



THE NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Reviewing Stand

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How Can We Combat Musical Illiteracy?

A radio discussion over WGN and the Mutual Broadcasting System

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Radio, Television and Columbia Recording Artist

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THE REVIEWING STAND is a weekly radio forum presented by Northwestern University. The program was first broadcast by Station WGN, Chicago, October 14, 1934. It has been on the air continuously since that time, originating in the WGN studios, and, since 1935, carried by the stations of the Mutual Broadcasting System. THE REVIEWING STAND presents members of the Northwestern University faculty and distinguished guests from business, government, education, and the press in round table discussions of contemporary problems—the questions that are in the news. The program is under the direction of James H. McBurney, Dean of the School of Speech, Northwestern University; Miss Myrtle Stahl, Director of Educational Programs, WGN, Chicago.

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How Can We Combat Musical Illiteracy?

MR. MCBURNEY: Our speakers today are Leonard Keller, Director of the Metropolitan School of Music in Chicago; Louis G. LaMair, President of the American Music Conference; Fabien Sevitzky, Conductor of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra; and Dorothy Shay, popular radio and TV star, and Columbia recording artist.

In recognition of National Music Week, we discuss the interesting question: How Can We Combat Musical Illiteracy? Keller, what do you mean by musical illiteracy? To what extent is musical illiteracy a matter of taste and appreciation, would you say?

'Acquire Taste'

MR. KELLER: We acquire a taste and appreciation of music in the same way people acquire a taste for certain foods. It becomes a habit when you eat certain foods, either to like or dislike them, to get an appreciation of them. By becoming familiar with these foods we have a basis for an appreciation or an evaluation in the same way we can evaluate music by becoming familiar with music in one or all, or many of its phases; by having a knowledge of one or all or many of these phases, we become musically literate. The person who was never subjected to music, if that were possible, in any form or shape or sound, would be a musical illiterate.

Since almost every human being comes in contact with music in one of its many phases, there of course results the problem of illiteracy: *to what degree* do they have an appreciation of music? The question is to what extent we can increase the degree of appreciation and extend tastes to include the great treasury of music historically and internationally.

MR. MCBURNEY: Are you saying that some knowledge or understanding of music is necessary to establish literacy?

MR. KELLER: It depends on what you mean by "literacy." To appreciate music is to go to symphonies which my colleague here, Fabien Sevitzky, conducts. This does not require a technical knowledge. Some friends of mine, who have no technical knowledge of music whatsoever enjoy concerts, I think, better than some of my friends who have a great deal of knowledge. They come with a pure, open mind and are willing to love the performance; those people need no technical knowledge.

MR. MCBURNEY: You agree with that, Dr. Sevitzky?

Open Mind

MR. SEVITZKY: Naturally, I would say that I appreciate and prefer audiences which come to my concerts and listen open-mindedly rather than people who come just to criticize. Those people come especially to hear the music.

MR. MCBURNEY: You think you have to have a technical knowledge about music to establish real appreciation?

MR. SEVITZKY: No, not at all.

MR. MCBURNEY: How do you feel about it, Miss Shay?

MISS SHAY: I don't think you have to have a technical knowledge. I certainly haven't myself and I enjoy every kind of music. There is no music I don't enjoy.

MR. MCBURNEY: Do you want people in your audience, listening to your hill-billy music, to have a technical understanding of music?

MISS SHAY: No, that would be the death of me. Because when I am singing or trying to entertain people, and especially in a supper club, I certainly am not trying to raise their standard of living or teach them anything. If anything, I am trying to teach them to relax. I don't think of it as trying to teach them anything. I am trying to entertain them, and if they knew all the technical flaws in my work, their enjoyment would be less. As a performer you have so many things to think about—for instance, lyrics have to be funny and presented in a way so they are funny, and you have to think of your gown and your hair, and so forth; you are not thinking of technicalities—you are thinking of the general picture.

MR. MCBURNEY: What kind of music does one have to appreciate in order to be called literate, Mr. LaMair?

Music Appreciation

MR. LAMAIR: One should appreciate all music; a knowledge of music, a familiarity with it, the ability to express oneself through music, and an ability to understand the message of the composer and the message of the artist or the orchestra which is performing it. Those are the qualities which comprise literacy.

MR. MCBURNEY: Do you make any distinction between good music and bad music?

MR. LAMAIR: No, I don't make any distinction, because I don't think there is such a difference. I think all music is good. I think we too frequently confuse the appraisal of the performance as being good or bad music, rather than the quality of the music. Music is intended to bring a message to the listener. It is an expression that the artist or the composer wants to deliver, and therefore it must be good.

MR. KELLER: I think that requires some clarification. I agree there is room for all types of music; for example, folk music, dance music, descriptive music. However, there is an

evaluation of music other than the performance and we all agree that a bad performance of the literature or repertoire is bad. But certainly there is distinction between good and bad music. Not every piece that was written by a bad composer, written badly, could be good.

'Good and Bad Music'

MR. SEVITZKY: I think there is good music and bad music, and to describe which is good and which is bad is very difficult. But the music which lives today and is going to live for generations to come, until eternity, is good music. Music which dies a natural death is bad music.

MR. KELLER: I might add to that, I agree it is very difficult during the era to distinguish which is the good music and the bad music. Witness the fact that most of the great composers, I think you will agree with me, were severely criticized during their period as being crazy, radical, definitely wrong, would not live, and so forth. Most of those people have lived and the platitudinous type of composer has died.

MR. MCBURNEY: You think that music is bad because of its effect, Doctor?

MR. SEVITZKY: No. Some music has been composed badly. Some of it has been written badly and wasn't acceptable to the ear of people and wasn't accepted in the generation in which it was composed. This music won't live and it stopped there when it was produced. Naturally, the great composers of the world were Bach, Beethoven, Schumann, Brahms, but not all music of today's great composers is also great. Some of them are mediocre.

MR. LAMAIR: They are not talking about the quality of the music. They are talking about whether or not certain compositions have proved to have mortality or immortality.

MISS SHAY: I think you are all considering more the classical music, and naturally I am going to think of my field, because that is the only thing I

know anything about. If you could see some of the stuff I get, believe you me, there is bad music. People send things in with not even the correct number of bars and the lyrics are what I call "stretching for rhyme." It is very badly written music.

MR. LAMAIR: That isn't even music.

MISS SHAY: No.

Be-Bop

MR. MCBURNEY: Are you willing to say that an appreciation of be-bop, good be-bop, is enough to establish musical literacy?

MR. LAMAIR: Definitely.

MR. SEVITZKY: What does it mean, be-bop? [Laughter]

MR. MCBURNEY: Don't ask me, Doctor.

MR. SEVITZKY: Who can answer that question? I know what boogy-woogy means.

MR. KELLER: Be-bop is a new word for boogy or jazz. It is a current expression. There isn't a great distinction between those types of music. Perhaps you would like to explain it, Miss Shay. I think you probably know more about it.

MR. SEVITZKY: Please do.

MISS SHAY: My experience with boogy-woogy or be-bop is strictly from having heard it. But it seems that in boogy-woogy and be-bop there is a great difference. In the first place, be-bop never has a melody as far as I can determine.

MR. SEVITZKY: But they have rhythm?

MISS SHAY: I am not sure what they have. You know—you have heard it. They flat at five's and they sound like discords to me. But, of course, the musicians themselves and some people seem to think that it gives some sort of message. So if it gives a message and if it gives a lift to somebody, it is good. As Mr. LaMair says, it may be good to somebody.

MR. MCBURNEY: It is perfectly conceivable that it might have the wrong kind of lift, a degrading effect?

MISS SHAY: No, you can't have a degrading effect by listening to something. It depends on your surroundings and your attitude and what you are thinking.

MR. LAMAIR: Be-bop is a form of popular music which many of the younger generation employ to express their attitude toward life and things in general. As those persons go on through the cycle of life their interests in music will progress beyond the be-bop stage to a different form, perhaps not good music, but different forms.

Stage of Development

MR. SEVITZKY: You are absolutely right, and I have noticed this within the last fifteen years, that those children 14, 15, 16 years of age who listen to boogy-woogy or be-bop, or anything else, are in a stage of development. When they reach 21, 22, 23 they are interested in the musical comedy, and at 30, 32 they are my audience.

MR. LAMAIR: That is right.

MR. SEVITZKY: Then they come to my concerts.

MISS SHAY: After 50 they are mine.

MR. LAMAIR: The start of their growth could not be bad. It had to be good.

MR. SEVITZKY: I had one very interesting experience. At one of the greatest universities in the Middle West I was playing Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet," and after the concert one of the boys came to my room to tell me how beautifully we played that "Moonlight—" What is it?

MR. LAMAIR: "Moonlight and Roses."

MR. SEVITZKY: Yes, and he said to me, "Tell me, when did Tchaikovsky make that arrangement? Is that a recent arrangement?" "No, Tchaikovsky composed that thing, but 'Moonlight and Roses' was arranged

from Tchaikovsky's composition." He said, "I didn't know; how interesting."

MR. MCBURNEY: I should say that you people, Miss Shay and you gentlemen, are very liberal in defining musical literacy or musical illiteracy. We have been talking about taste and appreciation as a factor. Mr. Keller has made some point about knowledge and understanding of music as a factor entering into literacy. How about participation and performance, Mr. Keller? Do you think the person who plays a musical instrument, who sings, who participates, who is something more than a passive reactor, is likely to be a keener student of music?

MR. KELLER: That is very possible. It is my hope that more people in the future will have a contact, a personal contact with music other than just listening. I am a great advocate of music as an avocation. I hope that many people will learn something about instruments, to play simply, but to play something or to sing.

MR. LAMAIR: I think the answer to that question is definitely "yes." Dr. Hans Rosenwald, the dean of the Chicago Musical College, recently gave a series of twelve lectures on music appreciation and at the close of the lectures he said, "You can learn music without participating in the performance of music, but you will learn ten times as rapidly if you do learn to play a musical instrument." You agree with that?

Musical Analyst

MR. SEVITZKY: Yes, with that, but at the same time there is a danger. If he is a regular listener, then he becomes a critic; then he becomes an analyst, a musical analyst, when he sits in the audience. And if you play the violin or cello, he says, "How the violins played that passage!" He is no longer listening to the music; he is analyzing how it is played.

MR. LAMAIR: He is using the knowl-

edge that he has acquired and that is always good. We have to keep these maestros on their toes, you know.

MISS SHAY: I was going to say, learning one instrument and having that as your only interest could be a form of illiteracy, because then you are illiterate about other forms. You are keeping in one little channel.

MR. KELLER: In answer to Mr. Sevitzky, I am afraid that that is a generality. Everyone who could get a cursory knowledge of an instrument does not become a hostile critic and lose his appreciation. That is a question of personality and individuality. There are certain people who always feel that way, but in my opinion the majority of people coming in direct contact with music through a personal acquisition of technical knowledge would not necessarily become obnoxious critics.

MR. SEVITZKY: As a performer I have in many instances seen musical students coming to our concerts who do not listen to the music as a whole. They criticize and analyze, whether it is done well or whether it is done badly. This could be corrected if the teacher or the instructor would tell them to go to the concert, not with an analytical mind or critical mind, but with an open mind and to listen to the music and try to learn more without any criticism.

MR. KELLER: I have no objection to an honest, analytical mind. I think that analysis is good for mind and soul. It is a combination, I think. I have no objection to students going to a concert with an analytical mind as long as they do not shut out their true emotional responses to it. The combination of the two would be the ideal factor.

Matter of Degree

MR. MCBURNEY: Apparently, as Kellar put it at the outset, this matter of musical literacy is a question of degree. Apparently, taste and appreciation and understanding of music, and personal competency in

music are all factors that need to be considered.

But let me ask you the sixty-four dollar question, Mr. Sevitzky. Why are you concerned about music? Why is music important?

MR. SEVITZKY: Because—that is not a sixty-four dollar question.

MR. MCBURNEY: That is an easy one for you?

MR. SEVITZKY: No, it is more expensive than sixty-four dollars, believe me. Why? Because music is the beginning and the end in our life, because we start with music and we end with music and music goes eternally forward. While it is intangible, while it is something you cannot hold like a hot dog or a piece of paper, it remains for you for all your life. It remains with your children, and the children after their children, and it is more tangible than anything else in the world. The empires, the big buildings, the pyramids themselves, those constructions have fallen. Music still remains there and is going to stay with us forever, and has enormous tangibility. Nothing can surpass music. That is why music is important.

MR. LAMAIR: Well, the Lord has put in the heart and soul of each of us an insatiable thirst for music. We need music to help us through vicissitudes, the hard part of our life. We need the period of enjoyment. There is nothing that can satisfy that appetite for music except music. It is insatiable, it is perennial, it is eternal. Therefore, if we would give each person an opportunity to acquire a knowledge of music we would be serving one of their very fundamental requirements in this life.

For All People

MR. MCBURNEY: You think all people are capable of acquiring a knowledge of music?

MR. LAMAIR: There is nobody incapable.

MR. MCBURNEY: You think this thing is universal?

MR. LAMAIR: Yes. You ought to go out in the jungles; you go into the most primitive type of existence on earth today, you find the natives have their form of music. Every archeological expedition which has dug up ancient ruins has found evidence of music in those ruins. All people at all times of their existence participated in music.

MISS SHAY: They certainly have an appreciation but they don't necessarily have knowledge.

MR. LAMAIR: No, I should say too few have knowledge.

MR. MCBURNEY: Do you think that musical literacy as we are defining and discussing it is increasing in America, Doctor?

MR. SEVITZKY: Very much so; enormously! And I think you have some data about that, how many orchestras we have and so on.

Music in Schools

MR. LAMAIR: Yes, there is lots of evidence to answer that, Dean McBurney. You have over 200 symphony orchestras in the United States today; local orchestras exist in many cities of populations as small as 25,000. The attendance at public performances of music exceeds the attendance at sports events in this country. That is not generally known. There are over 35,000 bands and orchestras in our high schools, and hundreds more in our elementary schools in this country, compared to practically none 30 years ago. Small communities today have the opportunity to see and hear performances of great singers, pianists and other artists. That is a new development. There is a shortage of qualified teachers of music in practically every school in every city in this country. There are more students than there are qualified teachers to teach.

The sale of phonograph records is greater today than ever before, and people in all walks of life, in all parts of the country turn to music on their radio and television sets as a pleasant

source of enjoyment.

MR. SEVITZKY: What you said is very nice, Mr. LaMair, because you read baseball accounts and see that 56,000 people attended a baseball game and the managers tell you, "See how popular it is," and a symphony concert only draws 3,500 or 2,000 people. Of course, we cannot compete with baseball, or with football, or any other kind of athletic entertainment, but on the whole we are doing much more for this world than athletics will do. But athletes, or the people who are interested, are taking from us everything that we have—our rhythm and synchronization and our method of presenting the thing. An athlete should be a musician in his heart to play the game; if he is not, if he has no rhythm, he cannot play any kind of game. So they are coming from us too.

Popular or Classical?

MR. McBURNEY: Don't you think the interest in music which you have evidence of, Mr. LaMair, is primarily an interest in popular music?

MR. LAMAIR: In all classes. You take a concert out here in Grant Park, there will be an attendance of fifty to a hundred thousand people to hear the finest singers in the opera. The Chicagoland Music Festival puts in 150,000 people, to hear all forms of music and great artists.

MR. McBURNEY: That is just a drop in the bucket compared with the people hearing Dorothy Shay and her hill-billy music, and other Dorothy Shays.

MR. KELLER: I think we are all agreed that in the past few years more people have become familiar with music, and their appreciation tastes have increased. Yet I agree with you that the problem is still vast.

MR. McBURNEY: You are not making a problem out of Miss Shay, are you?

MR. KELLER: No. [Laughter] I believe that the majority of music offered the public today is popular

music. Of that I don't think there is any argument. I think the sale of records will show that popular folk music far exceeds the classical music, and the attendance at theatres, musical comedies and motion picture houses far exceeds the concert hall; and the performances over the radio and television of popular and folk music or country music, or hill-billy music, far exceeds that of classical music. I would venture that 90 per cent of the music offered to 90 per cent of the people is popular music.

MR. McBURNEY: Does that disturb you?

'Taste Grows'

MR. KELLER: It does disturb me, because I think there is too great an emphasis on one phase of music. That phase of music offers a particular stimulus to these people which is not the entire story. I would hope for a greater balance in the world of music.

MR. McBURNEY: Apparently that doesn't disturb Mr. LaMair.

MR. LAMAIR: Not at all. They will grow into the better forms of music.

MR. SEVITZKY: Naturally. I would suggest if we could arrange this thing, say, for a whole week, and play boogy-woogy, and play the bebop or other kinds of popular stuff, all of that in a week and nothing else—just one week have nothing else but this kind of music, and let's see what is going to happen to this world. We are going to have millions and millions of letters asking for other music. That would be a test.

MR. McBURNEY: What do you think has been the effect of radio and television on music?

MR. SEVITZKY: Tremendous, just tremendous. As a matter of fact, in 1927, I guess it was, I was the first one who made a broadcast over the radio from New York, with my Philadelphia Symphony. That was the first orchestra on the radio in 1927, in February, and since that time look how many symphony concerts we

have, how many opera performances from the Metropolitan and think of the number of people listening. You can be assured that from two to four on Saturday afternoon when the Metropolitan Opera is on people will refuse to go anywhere and say, "No, I want to listen to the Metropolitan Opera and don't want to do anything else." It is a tremendous achievement.

Community Interest

And look at those organizations who are trying to organize their ready-made audience for the symphony orchestra—I mean the civic communities. This is a blessing for an artist today. They are doing a remarkable job. You don't need to go and sell your tickets or ask the Chamber of Commerce to sell tickets. You come to town and there is a ready-made audience for you.

MR. MCBURNEY: In working in the interest of musical literacy, to use the term of our broadcast, of improving taste and appreciation, better understanding of music and more participation and performance in music, how would you go about it? How would you combat musical illiteracy?

MR. KELLER: I think there are many

ways. I appreciate Dr. Sevitzky's last remarks. I think the field is very vast for improvement, particularly in the concert field. I object to the exclusivity of small groups of concert managers who have highly commercialized concerts. I would like to see more concerts in smaller communities by young American artists.

MR. MCBURNEY: What would you say about that, LaMair?

MR. LAMAIR: I would remove the mysticism surrounding music. I regard music as the common property of all people. I put less emphasis on ability in performing music, and more emphasis on participation in and knowledge of music. As a starter, I would extend to all children, during their earliest years in school, the opportunity to learn music during school hours as a part of their regular work in all grades. No child objects to learning music. The child objects to the intrusion of music on his free time.

MR. MCBURNEY: Thank you, Miss Shay and gentlemen. I think your analysis of musical illiteracy and ways of combating it and, I might add, your own enthusiasm for music, should give our listeners better insight into the meaning of National Music Week.

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EATON, QUAINTANCE, ed. *Musical U. S. A.* New York, Allen, Towne and Heath, 1949.

Traces the musical history of thirteen American cities.

HAGGIN, BERNHARD H. *Music for the Man Who Enjoys "Hamlet."* New York, Knopf, 1944.

Argues that the man who reads Shakespeare for pleasure will find the same kind of satisfaction in music.

SLONIMSKY, NICOLAS. *Road to Music.* New York, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1947.

A "painless study of the principal points in musical theory from the Greeks to Gershwin."

TAYLOR, DEEMS. *Music to My Ears.* New York, Simon and Schuster, 1949. Essays on music based on the author's radio talks.

American Mercury 65:473-80, O., '47. "Big Business and the Arts." B. M. STEIGMAN.

Declares that the present-day sponsorship of music and art by big business is not effective in creating the understanding and appreciation which the arts need. Maintains that it is the responsibility of the schools to provide this understanding, and shows why they have failed to do so.

Education 69:438-44, Mr., '49. "Liberal Arts College Music Appreciation Course." M. LOVELESS.

Describes one course offered by a typical American college, the materials and techniques used, and the excellent results achieved.

Etude 67:5, O., '49. "Listening Pleasure." L. STOKOWSKI.

Suggestions for intelligent listening.

Etude 67:470, Ag., '49. "Music, the Universal Language." H. HANSON.

Tells why, although music may be a universal language, it is a very difficult one, and discusses the problems faced by the educator who believes that an understanding of music is an essential part of the equipment of a well-educated man.

Etude 67:402-3, Jl., '49. "Summer Symphony." W. D. REVELLI.

Describes the various musical festivals and concerts which are becoming more and more popular in America.

Etude 67:226, Ap., '49. "Teen-agers and Music! A Conference with Deems Taylor." G. ARKLUND.

Analyzes the Week-End with Music interviews of the CBS Philharmonic intermission programs.

Etude 67:230, Ap., '49. "Today's Children Build Tomorrow's Audiences; A Conference with H. Griggs." M. FELLOWES.

A noted pianist and specialist in presenting music to children points out that children are given lessons, but very little encouragement or opportunity to hear music as entertainment. Tells what is being done abroad.

Harvard Educational Review 17:168-72, Summer, '47. "Contemporary American Music in Education." P. GORDON.

Declares that much good will result, both to American music and American education, as composers and teachers of music become better aware of each other.

House Beautiful 92:74, F., '50. "Honest Enjoyment of Music." R. WILLIAMS.

Maintains that enjoyment is the key to the improvement of musical taste.

House Beautiful 90:73, Ag., '48. "What You Think About Music; Summary of American Music Conference Survey." R. WILLIAMS.

The results of a survey undertaken at the behest of the American Music Conference. What Americans think about playing musical instruments, the place of music in education, listening to music, etc.

Music Educator's Journal 34:25-6, Ap., '48. "Producers and Consumers of Music." MARK C. SCHINNERER.

Suggests that the producers of music place less emphasis on their own perfectionism and pay more attention to increasing the quality and quantity of the consumers.

Music Educator's Journal 35:9-10, Ja., '49. "Real Aims of Musical Appreciation." H. D. MCKINNEY.

A serious critique of cultural opportunities in our present educational system. Maintains that music appreciation in the American college should improve taste and increase the understanding of life which results from learning to listen to good music, and from realizing the place it has held in the development of the world's culture.

Musical America 69:42, My., '49. "Critics Discuss Radio Music Education."

Deploring the present lack of cooperation between the public schools and the radio networks, declares that more effort should be made to secure better radio programs for purposes of music education.

New York Times Magazine p. 18, F. 23, '47. "Prescription for a New Kind of Opera." H. TAUBMAN.

Recommendations for bringing better opera to more people.

Saturday Review of Literature 32:157-64, Ag. 6, '49. "Flowering of American Music." H. HANSON.

Describes the elements which seem to be constant in any period and country making an important contribution to music literature, and points out that in America some of these conditions already exist and others are developing.

Saturday Review of Literature 28:38, S. 15, '45. "Music as Vital Education." F. L. ADLER.

Stresses the importance of the problem of the musical literacy of the layman to the professional musician, and describes ways to increase that literacy.

Saturday Review of Literature 29:44-5, Ap. 20, '46. "Wanted: A Musical Public." P. H. LANG.

Notes that although the foundations of an American musical culture are here, a lasting structure can be built only by a sincere and interested public.

Theatre Arts 33:44-6, Mr., '49. "It's Nice but Not Mozart." P. MOOR.

Against the growing type of musical snobbishness which disavows anything of lesser rank than a masterpiece.



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